THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. II. January 8, 1937 Tebet 25, 5697 No. 18

EDITORIALS

"RECOVERY" AND JEWISH WORKERS

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(*Concluded*)

by Edward L. Israel

WHITHER RECONSTRUCTIONISM?

by Samuel M. Blumenfield

CORRESPONDENCE

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EDITORIALS

"Recovery" and Jewish Workers

A RECENT news release of the National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds quotes Fred M. Butzel, welfare leader in Detroit, to the effect that both increased factory employment, and such Federal works projects as the WPA, have not shown a proportionate absorption of Jewish workers in Detroit. It also emphasizes, what is obvious in every Jewish community, that the depression has wrought great havoc among our commercial and industrial classes. Recovery among the industrial and white-collar groups is being greatly retarded. This condition, Mr. Butzel explains, is due in part to the existence of anti-Jewish employment prejudices. There are evidences in the East, at least, that this handicap extends to the public field as well. That this problem should exist in the area of a governmental set-up for WPA work is disheartening. It is, perhaps, much more universal than we might be inclined to admit, and should be a serious challenge to Jewish self-complacency and our customary inaction. However, minority groups should expect and be prepared for such evidences of discrimination. The phenomenon is world-wide. Its manifestation in this country should come neither as a shock, nor as something entirely unexpected.

The more important question is, now that Detroit Jewry is aware of this problem, what is being done toward a constructive solution of it? The question is not one which can be posed for Detroit alone, but for the one hundred or more of the larger Jewish communities in the United States as well. The general answer is: practically nothing! This reply, sad to relate, is not due to lack of funds, nor to a lack of suggested programs to meet the issues involved. It is probable that the expenditures of American Jewry for local, national and foreign social service will run well over fifty million dollars in 1936. Yet to the area of vocational guidance, employment, occupational retraining, vocational redirection, geographic redistribution, and to the general problem of breaking down the barriers which prevent Jews from sharing proportionately certain employment fields, the smallest kind of a pittance is provided by our Jewish communities. And even where some provision is made, it is done more or less planlessly, uncoordinated with any national program, and subject to rapid change or early discontinuance.

The problem requires local awareness of existing limitations and unjustified handicaps; a program of local activities which deals not alone with the end-results of unwholesome economic and social forces but attempts to achieve changes at the source of these difficulties; and local and national organization for research, for

constructive planning and joint effort. In the field of economic discrimination no single community can expect to make much headway, unless we are nationally organized to deal with the questions involved.

How Not To Fight Anti-Semitism

ONE of the worst fallacies concerning anti-Semitism is the mistaken notion that it is possible to mitigate anti-Jewish prejudice by showing to the world how great have been the Jewish contributions to society. Apologetics is a sorry sort of thing at best, but this particular form of apologetics is both distasteful and, what is worse, futile. It is distasteful because it leads to a cataloguing of Jewish achievement, an activity which can scarcely be kept free from unpleasant postures of group pride. It is futile because it fails to reckon with the basic causes of group prejudice. Anti-Semitism is the result of a psychosis to which momentum is given by economic forces. The person who is an anti-Semite is such either because of a fixation or because of economic interest. An accounting of Jewish contributions to the arts and sciences obviously can have no contact with the root cause of the prejudice. On the contrary, every insistence on the part of the Jew that Jews have benefited mankind is likely to have the opposite effect. The anti-Semite does not want to be convinced. What is more, since his dislike of Jews is likely to be a matter of blind emotion, he will resent any intimation of his indebtedness to the Jew. And when he is confronted by indisputable evidence of such indebtedness he will turn about and deny its value.

As a proof of the futility of attempting to combat anti-Semitism by a demonstration of Jewish achievement we quote the following instance. *The Jüdische Rundschau* in its issue of November 27, 1936 carries an account of the proceedings of the "Research Division on the Jewish Question" which is part of the "Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany." In the quotations and abstracts of the papers which were read before this learned society one sees how bitterly anti-Semites resent the thought of their cultural indebtedness to Jews, and how inevitably they respond, not by an admission that their anti-Semitism is unjustified but by a neurotic insistence that the supposed Jewish contribution is no contribution at all.

Consider, for example, the opening address of Professor Lenard, physicist at Heidelberg. Professor Lenard first insists that all the way from Kepler to Bunsen German science got along perfectly well without Jewish contributions. He contends furthermore that the more recent Jewish participation in German science has had a disastrous effect. The Jewish scientist, he contends, expresses himself in sterile theory. He merely plays at science. Whereas the Aryan approaches nature with earnestness, caution, with a fear of error, with a determination to wrest the truth from the stubborn fact, the Jew either disregards the fact or steals the research results of the Aryan and attempts to make them appear his own by fitting them into pointless, uncreative and confused theories.

The sentiments expressed in this address were echoed by other German scholars in all fields of the sciences and arts, in legal theory, in history, in literature and in aesthetics. From each of these addresses there comes the unmistakable conviction that the anti-Semite reacts adversely to being reminded of the Jewish contribution and that he will attempt to explain that contribution away when it looms so large as to be inescapable.

This kind of apologetic is futile and in bad form. What is worse, it proceeds from a wrong assumption. The Jew who argues with the non-Jew that Jews should be well treated because they are creative says in effect the following: "You should allow us to enjoy life and liberty because by so doing you and all mankind will be benefited." This is the wrong basis of approach. On the contrary, the Jew's attitude must be, "We have a right to life

and liberty. If we are creative, all the better. But even if we are not, that right is ours by virtue of the fact that we are human beings."

Let us stop apologizing and justifying our right to live. If there is anyone whom we must impress with the extent of Jewish cultural contributions, let us impress our fellow-Jews. At least among them it will have the salutary effect of strengthening their inner morale. Let us go about our business. If we have abilities, let us express them to the full. There is only one possible slogan for the Jewish artist and the Jewish scientist, not the fallacy of "art and science for the anti-Semite's sake," but rather "art and science for their own sake and for the sake of mankind."

The A. F. of L. Shows Its True Colors

THE history of the most recent times reveals a uniform pattern in strategy on the part of organized reaction when it decides to strike out against progressive movements and leaders. For years now, the Hearst chain of newspapers has been labeling as "communistic, un-American, and subversive" every attempt on the part of labor leaders, teachers and elected representatives to sponsor progressive ideas or legislation. Through the persistent and deft use of words and cartoons, Mr. Hearst has not only developed the fine art of "red-baiting," but also the art of labeling all opponents to reaction as "reds" thereby qualifying them as victims of the red-baiting to follow.

Mr. Hitler, of course, has similarly developed "Jew-baiting" into a fine art. Not only do the Jews serve as a convenient scapegoat on whom all the troubles of a defeated and impoverished Germany can be blamed, but they serve as an object of hate upon whom an enraged populace can vent their wrath. Having depicted the Jews in the role of the devil (which myth is sustained through never-ceasing propaganda), it then becomes easier to scotch or discredit all progressive ideas and movements by resorting to the simple device of labeling them as "Jewish."

Red-baiting and the "red-scare" as well as Jew-baiting and the "Jew-scare" are thus the twin tools of reactionaries and fascists the world over. They constitute an unfailing guide to the reactionary quality of any movement or individual. Let us take the American Federation of Labor, for instance.

Last year the A. F. of L. convention adopted an amendment to its constitution barring communists from representation or recognition in any Central Body or State Federation of Labor. Its original intention was to bar all "reds" regardless of how that word was to be interpreted.

In the last presidential election, W. L. Hutcheson, head of the Carpenters' (Craft) Union, which next to the Miners' is the largest union in the A. F. of L., joined the Republican National Committee, thus sharing responsibility for the iterations of its chairman that a vote for Roosevelt meant a vote for the "communist Dubinsky." This, in spite of the fact that David Dubinsky, head of the Ladies Garment Workers' Union (and presidential elector for Roosevelt in New York on the Labor Party ticket) had prided himself as having fought and defeated the communists in his own union.

Further proof that the leadership of the A. F. of L. is reactionary is evidenced by the proceedings of the recent A. F. of L. convention. As is well known, about one-third of the membership of the A. F. of L. have formed a Committee for Industrial Organization under the leadership of John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers' Union, for the purpose of organizing on an industrial union basis, the great mass of unorganized workers in the basic industries. The leaders of the craft unions who control the A. F. of L. would rather maintain their positions of power and privilege in the present set-up, than risk the loss of such favored position by aiding in the development and growth of industrial unions. In the struggle to stem the rising power of the C. I. O. in its progressive efforts to organize the unorganized, the

A. F. of L. in its convention this year chalked up an all-time record in the quantity and quality of its reactionary resolutions. Not the least of its 'accomplishments' was its attempt to inject for the first time in its history the time-worn tactic of despair, namely "Jew-baiting."

Though the C. I. O. was not openly charged as being a Jewish plot, there was enough of innuendo and insinuation in the attacks upon it to lead to the inevitable inference that it was such a plot. The Resolutions Committee of the A. F. of L. went even so far as to chide the Jewish members of the C. I. O. for not appreciating the helping hand patronizingly extended to them "when there were few hands willing to greet them." (This unkind thrust is especially ironic when one considers that the organizer and first president of the American Federation of Labor was a Jew by the name of Samuel Gompers.)

That only a reactionary organization could have resorted to such tactics is borne out by the shameful record of this A. F. of L. convention. For, among other things, it refused to allow a duly accredited representative of the Spanish trade-union movement to address the delegates, thereby giving aid and comfort to the Spanish rebels in Spain; it refused to consider boycotting Hearst but voted instead to boycott a union label because the union in question joined the C. I. O. It shelved proposals in favor of a constitutional amendment that would insure social legislation, and it rejected proposals for the formation of a labor party.

The last presidential election has shown that the American people, by and large, are not easily fooled into red-scares or Jew-scares. The A. F. of L. leadership nevertheless, in its frantic despair to stem the tide of industrial unionism and of progressive action generally, will no doubt continue to resort to the favorite tools of reaction the world over. In the faith, however, that the world is governed by a "Power making for righteousness," we can only foresee the doom of the A. F. of L. in its present leadership even as we hope and pray for the ultimate triumph of the forces of truth and righteousness everywhere.

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A Critique of "Reformism" *

By Edward L. Israel

IV

THE Russian land laws of 1881 and the era of pogroms under Alexander III and Nicholas II completely changed the development of all Jewish life in America. The millions of immigrants who poured into America from Eastern Europe ultimately outnumbered, ten to one, the members of the families of the German immigrations. The new arrivals brought with them for the greater part a close sympathy with rabbinic traditions. Many who remained loyal to the synagogue soon felt the need of what might be called "religious Americanization." The atmosphere of the average Reformist congregation, however, failed to appeal to them. It was, in their own words, "too goyish." There were also economic and particularly social factors at work which, for a long time, created a cleavage which helped to keep the newer immigrants and even their children voluntarily or involuntarily out of the Reformist congregations. Those who sought membership in the Reformist ranks, often out of profound sympathy with this newer form of Judaism, were taunted by their own group as being "social climbers." This frequently acted

*The first half of Rabbi Israel's article appeared in the issue of December 25, 1936.

as a strong deterrent. At least for quite a while. Then, too, the old German Jewish leadership of the Reformist synagogues occasionally showed a disinclination to welcome the East-European Jew to the Temple, or very frequently tolerated him but would not permit his election to any official position in the congregation. This latter condition exists in many Temples to this very day.

The social factor was, and continues to be, an even greater barrier in religious life in America than religious conviction. Many Jews who are no more observant in their own personal lives than members of Reformist synagogues and who would personally prefer the Reformist services, refuse to join Temples because of the social discriminations still practiced by German against Russian Jew. The recent economic depression has caused many social clubs to lower the bars to a carefully selected few, but the memories of past discriminations are too fresh.

Despite these strong factors which have impeded the march of the East-European Jews into Reformist synagogues, the enormous numbers which have become affiliated, especially west of the Atlantic seaboard, have completely changed the personnel and background of the Reformist Temple of today. In some communities, the descendants of Russian Jews completely dominate the Reformist congregational life. In others, they do not yet dominate, but will very soon.

This has been due, in many instances, to the enormous decline of leadership and interest on the part of the old German Jewish families. While it is true that they still hold the power in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the national American Reformist lay body, the number of individual congregations which were formerly officered by German Jewish families and are now in charge of children of Russian or Polish immigrants is constantly increasing. A survey of spiritual mortality in the ranks of German Jewish families who were once outstanding in American Jewish life shows alarming results. Among the wealtheir in particular, children and grandchildren are only formally connected with the synagogue, if at all, and usually take little or no part in the religious life of the community. The exceptions to this generalization are alarmingly few. Congregational leadership has sometimes been assumed by other Jewish families of German extraction, but in most cases the children of East-European Jews are stepping into the vacated places.

This change in the complexion of the membership of Reformist Temples has had its effects on the whole attitude of Reformist Judaism. Recently, the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods sent out a questionnaire to its members. They were interrogated on such matters as their desire for increased ceremonialism, extended use of Hebrew prayers and traditional melodies in the services, and the like. The answers showed a marked conservative swing over what a group of Reformist Jewish laymen would have answered only twenty-five years ago. Today in the homes of Temple members there is a wider observance of Friday evening Kiddush, Seder and Chanukah than has existed at any time in the history of American Reformism. This is unquestionably the influence of the East-European Jewish accretions who want Reformist Judaism but with a greater adherence to outstanding Jewish ceremonials. In the Temple Sunday Schools more Hebrew is taught than ever before. The text books are far more conservative in their spirit. Palestine is regarded as part of a living present and not a buried past. Of course, this latter fact is due to the Balfour Declaration and the events which followed, intensified by the establishment of the Jewish Agency and particularly by the role of Palestine in the lives of the refugees from Hitlerism. But while the bulk of Reformist synagogue members are still unaffiliated with Zionism, the East-European influence has hastened the adaptation of the religious school and even the congregation to a far more tolerant attitude toward Zionism.

The chief influence of the Polish and Russian migrations in their effect on Re-

formist Judaism in America has been in the rabbinate. With the exception of the few German refugee students now at the Hebrew Union College, the Reformist rabbis of the last quarter of a century and more have been almost entirely the children or grandchildren of East-European immigrants. A few exceptions exist, but the proportion is very, very small. And whereas the older Reformist rabbis who were born in Russia or who were the children of Russian Jews entered "Temples" where the membership was predominantly "German Reform," these more recent graduates have found in their congregations an appreciable number of constituents who have had a similar background to their own. It is no reflection on these older rabbis that most of them became ardent anti-Zionists and "Pittsburgh Platform Reformers." They were thoroughly in accord with their rabbinic training and their professional and social environment. The younger group found an environment far more sympathetic to many of the inclinations derived from their homes. They were able to exercise it with a real following. Moreover, world events as well made all this drift possible.

V

Change in any movement is never the result solely of leadership or of mass demand. Both these elements always enter into the picture. And both are largely motivated by the circumstances of environment and history. Such has been the course of the development of Reformist Judaism in the 20th century. It is no delimitation of the quality of leadership or independence of thought of the newer generation of Reformist rabbis to assert that their work has been greatly motivated by the environment of their youth and by the changing conditions of Jewish life in the world. Nor does it at all detract from their achievements in bringing Reformism more into line with Jewish national as well as religious tradition to assert that these achievements have had a great measure of success because of the changes in the membership constituency of Reformist congregations. For such are the facts.

We can get our best picture of the metamorphosis which has taken place in the Reformist movement by viewing this situation against the background of the Pittsburgh Platform. Let me make clear that these attitudes I describe are not unanimous among the American Reformist rabbinate. They are, however, the general opinions of a definite majority as is evidenced by the various actions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in recent years. The numbered points which follow are parallel to those given in our description of the Pittsburgh Platform.

1. The spirit of universalism and the attitude regarding the preeminence of Judaism in religious thought are today definitely the Reformist rabbinical portion as in 1885.

2. There is also the same modern scientific attitude toward Biblical literature which accepts inspiration rather than revelation as the essence of religious value.

3. There is still an acceptance of a difference between what might be called the religiously temporary and the eternal. The big issue on which many modern Reformist rabbis part company with the Pittsburgh Platform is in its judgment as to what need be dispensed with, or even what can be safely dispensed with today. There is among the contemporary majority of the Reformist rabbinate a genuine regret that American Reformist Judaism allowed many picturesque and uniquely Jewish ceremonies of synagogue and home to fall into disuse without a real struggle for their preservation. The tendency of the Pittsburgh Platform, as many believe, was too strongly in favor of putting the Temple service as closely as possible formally in line with the Protestant church service and to eliminate from synagogue and home life any observances which might seem exotic or jarring to the Gentile world.

In addition to this, the great majority of the Reformist rabbis today recognize a principle of value in ceremonialism

which was utterly repudiated by the Pittsburgh Platform. They feel that ceremonies have a "group" value which has meaning even after the so-called divine significance is rejected. It is possible to accept a Reformist theology and still observe Kashruth out of a feeling that this is a uniting bond of the Jewish people hallowed by history—and that this bond has a spiritual value. Thus ceremonies are being reintroduced, not only for their religious significance but to establish closer "group" unity with the rest of Jewish life.

4. It is in regard to the Pittsburgh Platform assertion that the Jews are "not a nation but a religious community" and the disavowal of a return to Palestine that the present majority of the Reformist rabbinate parts company most radically from the Reformists of 1885.

For many years following the adoption of the Pittsburgh Platform, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed resolution after resolution in condemnation of Zionism. When Herzl appeared on the scene, this body was one of his outstanding opponents, and led its congregations to a bitter assault on everything Zionistic. On the floor of the conference, the few rabbis who dared defend a Zionist position received short shrift. Even when the Balfour Declaration was issued and later when the United States Senate recorded its sympathy with the reestablishment of the Jewish Homeland in Palestine, the Reformist rabbinate bitterly fought against the issue. Even the formation of the Jewish Agency found most of the old guard moving along unwillingly and gulping badly. But by that time the younger generation of the conference was asserting itself and frequently resolutions were being passed, endorsing the support of the upbuilding of Jewish Palestine.

Hitler's and Nazism's rise to power with Palestine assuming a new role in Jewish life as the sole haven of German Jewry, completely changed the picture from anything the Pittsburgh Platform could possibly have envisioned. The older anti-Zionists died hard. One of them tore his community asunder by salving his feelings with the public expression somewhat to the effect that "the advent of German Jewry into Palestine was the leavening influence necessary to give dignity to Palestinian Jewry." This was his reason, so he alleged, for modifying his uncompromising opposition to everything connected with modern Palestine.

The climax came in Chicago in 1935 when a resolution was passed by the annual convention of the Reformist Rabbinical Conference, declaring null and void all anti-Zionist actions or resolutions of the past. The leaders who proposed this resolution could have forced through a positive Zionist declaration. They did not do this for several reasons:

(a) The Reformist congregations of America still contain large elements of those who were reared as anti-Zionists. At present most of these folk are not anti- but non-Zionists. It was felt, in the first place, that it was bad policy suddenly to dogmatize on the other side and practically put these people out of step with the rabbinical conference; and secondly, that the process of education whereby they could be won over to Zionism would make greater strides if there were no action of compulsion or dictation. (b) While the non-Zionist element of the Central Conference is now a minority, it is still of substantial numerical strength. It was felt by the Zionists that it would be unwise to split the conference on this issue at a time when the drift is strongly toward Zionism. It was furthermore felt that with a much finer democratic and tolerant spirit than that which had been shown to the Zionists when they were a minority, the present Zionist majority would not try to force anything so fundamental on the non-Zionists.

The matter of Zionism or non-Zionism was therefore left to the individual. Anti-Zionism, however, was definitely repudiated. As a sign of the sympathy of the conference, a paragraph was appended to the resolution, stating that the Reformist rabbinate looks with favor upon the re-

habilitation of Jewish life in Palestine and pledges its entire support.

Preceding this official action by some months, a Labor Palestine resolution, endorsing the work of the Histadruth, was signed by 241 members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis acting as individuals. This comprises the great majority of the membership. Among the signatories were the present president of the conference and several past presidents. Significantly, the resolution referred to Palestine as "*the* Jewish Homeland." In 1920, a bitter struggle had resulted in a refusal of the conference to use the word "the" in connection with the Jewish Homeland. Thus times change!

5. The Zunz and Geiger interpretations of Jewish history are accepted with certain modifications and additions. Reformist Judaism strives now for contact not only with Jewish religious tradition but also with what we might call "group tradition." Jewish folkways, non-religious literature and movements, and particularly modern Palestinian culture are regarded as part of that unbroken bond of Jewish life with which we must strive to associate ourselves.

Let it not be inferred that Reformist Judaism has "sold out" to secularization or that there is any denial of the primacy of the religious message of Israel. Every activity of Jewish life in which modern Reformism interests itself has a religious motive. Jewish folkways and institutions of a not essentially religious nature are our concern because all of them contribute to the preservation of the Jewish group; *and without the Jewish group there can be no Judaism.* In the cause of helping Judaism to survive, everything which contributes to a strong Jewish consciousness becomes a matter of deep religious concern to the modern Reformist rabbi.

The world tendencies of a narrowing chauvinistic nationalism have been a source of regret and concern to the adherents of this wing of Reformism. They have, however, as a result of the vicious types of nationalism as exhibited in the most extreme form of Nazism, realized that it would be the height of folly to dissipate the group idealism of the Jew at this stage of world culture. As a matter of fact, although the "mission" idea of early Reformism has played less of a role in contemporary Reformist Jewish preaching, there is a growing feeling that particularly today, the best interests of humanity can be served by maintaining the Jewish group distinctive and in closer touch with its traditions, as an example of what a national consciousness can become in the idealistic sense of the term. Secularists and anti-Zionists may mock at such a philosophy. The Reformist rabbis of today feel nevertheless that this is the most vital truth which modern Israel can live in this era of reaction.

6. The "goodwill" section of the Pittsburgh Platform is thoroughly in accord with present Reformist attitudes with possibly one exception. There is a definite insistence today on a respect for differences as well as similarities. That principle, which in a philosophy of democracy is known as "cultural pluralism," becomes a fundamental factor in religious understandings. The right to be different in belief and ceremony is held to be just as sacred as the bonds of unity. This emphasis is in itself a characterization of the whole philosophy of modern Reformism.

7. Theologically, the attitude of contemporary Reformism on matters of Heaven and Hell, bodily resurrection and immortality remains about the same as that of the Pittsburgh Platform. More recent scientific discoveries and hypotheses have been incorporated harmoniously into the whole theological structure of Reformist Judaism. The Humanist movement, however, has gained very little hold, and the general theological drift at present is conservative.

8. In the realm of Social Justice, the Reformist rabbis have assumed a role far beyond anything which was anticipated at the time of the Pittsburgh declaration. Particularly in recent years, as the injustices of contemporary economic life have become more grievous, and the unbridled

evils of our power machine age have worked havoc on masses of men, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, under the leadership of its Commission on Social Justice, has stood in the forefront of the religious fight for economic righteousness. It has entered directly into several concrete situations of industrial unrest. It has even incorporated into the ritual of Yom Kippur a Social Justice prayer which treats the general principles of social justice from a contemporary point of view. It has interested itself in such specific problems of wages and hours and social security, and has questioned and condemned the fundamental moral validity of a system which puts profit above general human welfare.

As a result, some terrific resentment has developed on the part of economically conservative Reformist Jewish laymen. Even now attempts are in progress to try to curb rabbinic action. As the critical economic crisis draws nearer, the gap between the economic ideas of rabbi and congregant grow more and more pronounced. This is especially marked because the Reformist lay group includes a greater proportion of folks who have large holdings in the present economic order. What the result will be cannot be forecast. Four possibilities seem to present themselves: (a) the majority of the Reformist rabbis will continue their left-wing liberalism and force a definite schism in the Reformist movement; (b) the recalcitrant laymen will permit the present situation to go on, where the opinions of the pulpit find little sympathy in the pews; (c) the rabbis will be driven into line by the economic conservatives; (d) a complete collapse of democracy with a world spread of Nazism and Fascism will force Jewish life into another ghetto where contact with the outside world and its problems will be lost in a Jewish struggle for survival amid oppression and segregation.

VI

Reformist Judaism is the most interesting movement which has occurred in Jewish life for many centuries. It is still too much a part of contemporary history, even in its origin, for us to be able to give a scientific evaluation of its probable ultimate contribution, either positive or negative, to Jewish history. It is certainly not the fiendish and diabolic enemy of Jewishness which its enemies have pronounced it; nor is it the ultimate in salvation as its most ardent protagonists have claimed.

If German Reformist Judaism had not arisen, so-called Conservative Judaism could not have planned its course with nearly as much caution. And it is well within the realm of possibility that the complete rejection of Shulhan Aruk authority by Reformism, regrettable as it appears today, was necessary at the time to stem the tide of apostasy. Reformist Judaism took what it honestly felt to be the absolutely vital leap, and in leaping it sacrificed any sort of central authority. From this utter lack of central authority, Reformist Judaism has gained some, but has suffered more. Past efforts to establish a Reformist synod have failed. Whether the narrowing confines of Jewish life in a world of reaction will produce a new Reformist central authority is a matter of conjecture.

Negative arguments cannot constitute a real defense of any movement; and yet the rank chaos of Orthodox Jewish life in America contrasts unfavorably with many phases of Reformism, despite the latter's official lack of authority. In other words, it seems that there is much room for argument that a liberalism with a growing sense of group responsibility is better than an official constituted authority which gets only lip service from its followers. There is very little real Orthodox Judaism in America. There is much of travesty which goes by that name. The intransigence of even the younger American Orthodox leaders is creating a situation where the accepted orthodoxy is simply a membership in a *schul* and an antagonism against Reformism; although one's private life from a literally ceremonial point of view is no more observant, or often not as ob-

servant as that of the average Temple member. Reformism at least possesses the virtue of honesty—and its adherents to a marked degree are now trying to come closer to Jewish tradition and practice. An inclination without a "must" is certainly morally better than a "must" with neither inclination nor observance.

The plight of the United Synagogue's type of Judaism becomes increasingly more complex. Its hold on youth is good, but an analysis of their fundamental ideas would unquestionably show these youth far more in agreemnt with the Reformist idea of "inspiration" than with the Orthodox idea of "revelation." Spiritually these young people are "Reformist Jews," even though they belong to so-called "Conservative" synagogues, and perhaps occasionally observe more practices of Jewish ceremonial tradition than the Temple members. Rabbis of the Rabbinical Assembly, face to face with the *agunah* or *halizah* problem, recognize the impossibility of an unbending Shulhan Aruk Judaism. In the end they will have to act the same in spirit as Zunz and Geiger, finding a rationalistic reason for "Reformism." Or else they will hypocritically dodge the issue as long as possible.

As a matter of fact, contemporary "Reformist" and "Conservative" Judaisms are moving strongly toward each other. How far that rapprochement will go, and whether there will ultimately take place a union, formal or practical, are matters of conjecture, depending pretty much on the effect of events on the future development of the Jewish community. Certainly the trends within each group do not make such a union an impossibility. Rather the contrary!

Whither "Reconstructionism"?

By Samuel M. Blumenfield*

THE editorial of November 27 suggests two possible alternative functions for Reconstructionism—one, to create a "school of thought" and thus challenge the thinking Jew, and the other, to proceed with the actual practice of the tenets of Reconstructionism by means of "organization" technique.

Not being intimately associated with "Reconstructionist" activities, I realize that my knowledge of the situation is rather inadequate, but to the extent that I have followed the movement and observed the reactions of various elements to Professor Kaplan's teachings, it is my impression that Reconstructionism has struck root among a far larger number of people in the rabbinate, Jewish education, and the thinking laity, than formal allegiance or adherence would indicate. I have yet to come across a man or a woman who takes Jewish life and problems seriously, who is not familiar with or influenced by Kaplan's views. Even under such favorable conditions continued study and interpretation of Reconstructionism is essential, in order to keep the movement abreast of changing needs in a rapidly changing Jewish world. At the same time, I fear that a deliberate attempt at mere "philosophizing" about "Judaism as a civilization" may lead to another verbal creed or dogma rather than to vital Jewish experience. It is fair to say that intelligent discussion of Professor Kaplan's program has been going on for about a quarter of a century. Should such discussion continue without some attempt at the concretization of the ideals of Reconstructionism, there is grave danger that even its protagonists will follow the path of least resistance and convert the movement into a "way of talking about Jewish life" rather than a "way of living." You must know that there are already today a goodly number of Reconstructionists who take

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the attitude of "Halakah V'en Morin Kan"—Reconstructionist ideas are good, they lend themselves to good discussion and to preaching, but there is nothing to be done about it.

To foster the creation of a "school of thought" when the program calls for a "school of life" is tantamount to embarking upon the longest possible route and exposing one's self to the danger of wandering off into tangents and deviations for the purpose of reaching a certain destination.

As to the "organization" approach, you yourself seem to be quite conscious of the tremendous obstacles that are in the way. Under present chaotic conditions in American Jewry there is every danger that no matter how efficient an organization Reconstructionism may evolve, it would be drowned in the variety of numberless parties, divisions, and groupings, and would be looked upon as merely "another organization." As I see it, a program of Reconstruction calls for a conception of the new edifice embodied in charts and blueprints, the clearing away of the debris of the old structure, and the labor and material for the erection of the new building. In my estimation Reconstructionism already has its blueprints and its builders, but what it needs in order to proceed with the new edifice is to clear the ground. The next logical step, therefore, of Reconstructionism would be to remove the tremendous amount of rubbish that has been accumulated in Jewish life. This clearing could be achieved by a continuous and merciless critique on the part of The Reconstructionist of everything that is rotten and superfluous in Jewish life. The very duplication or multiplication of Jewish organizations and institutions makes them competitive in character and hence vulnerable to vigorous and honest scrutiny. There is therefore good reason to believe that such a critique would go a long way towards clearing up the anarchy and confusion in our midst. Without such preliminary step, I fear that our ideas and ideals will be stifled before they ever get a chance at fruition.

By way of illustration as to the kind of problems with which we need to deal, let me consider the state of affairs in Zionism, a movement which, to a great extent, motivates the philosophy of Reconstructionism.

To cite a personal experience, within less than two weeks I received about ten invitations asking me for contributions to Zionist causes. I want to admit outright that as a salaried man with a rather limited income I personally find such frequent requests quite irritating, particularly when I am not prepared to decide which of these requests is of greatest importance and therefore should take precedence. However, it is not merely a matter of personal discomfort. Sooner or later I should probably learn how to solve my personal dilemma just as many others have done, I presume by disregarding most of such requests. However, I cannot help but feel that if these many campaigns and appeals continue unchecked, movements and organizations will keep on growing, cancer-like, on the body of our people and will destroy the little vitality that is left in our midst.

Let me enumerate the organizations within the orbit of Zionist interests which are making appeals: The Zionist Organization of America, the United Palestine Appeal, the Jewish National Fund, the Campaign for Trees, Hadassah, the Campaign for the Rothschild Hospital, the Geverkschaften Campaign, the League for Labor Palestine, the Campaign for "The Jewish Frontier," the Hechalutz, the Haganah, the Hebrew University, the Histadrut Ivrit, the Campaign for Hebrew Books in Palestine, Avukah, and Young Judea. These do not include rightist Zionist organizations, to which I am definitely opposed, nor the Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Congress, local charities, the Campaign for Polish Jews, the Hias, and scores of other benevolent, cultural, and religious institutions of all types and descriptions, which keep on knocking at our doors day in and day out and which, in one form or another, I deem it my duty to support.

For the moment I am disregarding the inherent danger of this new Jewish "torba" which, as in the days of Mendeleh Mocher S'farim, is casting its shadow over Jewish group life in America. I am confining my observations to the many appeals that are being made within Zionist circles, in which I see an outright violation of the very essence of Zionism. One of the basic tenets of the Zionist movement is to achieve the Jewish renaissance through national discipline rather than through appeals for charity; the many diversified campaigns that are going on within Zionist groupings, far from permitting national solidarity, actually encourage endless and indefinite divisions and sub-divisions which, dragon-like, seem to raise their heads into new organizations and institutions.

It is quite disturbing to think that within the progressive Zionist elements alone we have the following numerous organizations: Poale Zion-Zeire Zion, the National Labor Union, the Geverkschaften Campaign, the Pioneer Women's Organization, the Habonim, the League for Labor Palestine, the Hechalutz, the Hashomer Hatzair, and Gordonia, each of these holding its conferences, conventions, campaigns, banquets; publishing its official organs, leaflets, and other propaganda literature; engaging in a hundred and one other activities by availing themselves of all the vast and expensive paraphernalia which are of no value in themselves but have become indispensible for the purpose of stimulating a limited group of liberal Zionists in behalf of Labor Palestine. Far from complementing each other, each of these organizations sees in itself both means and end, movement and organization, ideal and institution, and conducts its activities, and particularly its campaigns, in a manner which suggests that it alone is of crucial significance to the cause of Jewish progressive nationalism.

I have spent the greater part of my mature life both in study of and service to Zionism and Zionist causes, and I must confess that I am at a loss as to which of these organizations deserves my greatest interest and loyalty. I am certainly at a loss as to how to guide young people and children in this bewildering labyrinth of movements, institutions, and organizations. How much more should this state of affairs be bewildering to the average layman. Of course I am aware of the subtle ideological distinctions which seem to separate these many organizations, but of what meaning are such theoretic distinctions when in actual life all these organizations follow the same line of action and an identical procedure in their appeals? They all appeal indiscriminately to any and all elements of Jewry, each one ready and willing to receive support from people, regardless of whether they understand or subscribe to the ideal in behalf of which they are called upon to contribute. Under such circumstances theoretic distinctions become an unworthy attempt at sheer lip service.

It is a known fact that in a number of communities those very elements that Zionists, and particularly progressive Zionists, deem it necessary to combat and counteract through their party organs and ideological pronunciamentos, those very elements are invited to become sponsors and spokesmen for Zionist enterprises and institutions. What could be more demoralizing than such procedure? I am fully aware of the fact that this sort of opportunism is being followed at present by the Communist Party under the slogan of the United Front. But whether one agrees with the opportunistic and Jesuitic methods of the communists or not, one must credit them at least with the fact that they are following this new policy openly and deliberately. Our situation is much more grave, for we are permiting the same tactics and procedure to insinute themselves through the back alleys of our conscious. Moreover, there is every indication that this opportunism and process of vulgarization, far from strengthening Zionism, is actually demoralizing the movement and disintegrating the organization. Sooner or later American and Palestinian Jewry will have to pay the price

for this wild orgy of campaigning, appealing, and "conventioning."

I have dwelt on the Zionist situation, for it concerns me greatly, but as you know, similar conditions are to be found in our religious institutions, in philanthropy, in education, in fraternal and protective associations, and in practicaly every nook and corner of Jewish life. Continuous, vigorous, constructive criticism, on the part of *The Reconstructionist,* of these daily Jewish actualities I feel would ultimately have its salutary effects and prepare American Jewry for the program of Reconstructionism. *The Reconstructionist,* in devoting its columns to a frank discussion of ugly Jewish realities, need not exclude the opportunity for deepening the philosophy of Reconstructionism, but while studying its editors would do well, at least for the next few years, to wield a mighty shovel.

Correspondence

Sirs:

Our attention has been called to the article that appeared in "The Reconstructionist" under the caption, "Is God A Capitalist?" I submit herewith a reply to this article as prepared by a member of our Executive Committee who, I am quite certain, is intimately acquainted with the policies of our organization and is probably in a better position to interpret them than the friend who as we think erroneously interpreted our organization as capitalistic.

We should be pleased to have you print this article if you will, as a correction of what we regard as a misleading interpretation of our work in your article.

To the reply of our committee representative, I wish to add one or two other important facts which we think have a vital bearing upon the injustices that sometimes result from this type of reporting.

First: On the Town Hall program there were three main addresses from three representatives of the Catholic, the Protestant and the Jewish faiths. The person from whom you quote was not one of our official spokesmen representing any of these faiths. Second, the three main addresses, for which we had carefully prepared, were submitted to us in advance, were mimeographed by us and at the meeting were available to you or to any other representative of the press.

The statement which you feature as the dominating note of the meeting was not taken from one of these three previously prepared official statements.

Third, the person from whom you quote is not a member of our committee and was not scheduled to speak, but was asked to read to the audience a letter which he had received from President Roosevelt. In reading the letter he made some more or less impromptu comments of his own accord which were at no time submitted to any member of the Committee, and were by no means the official message of the meeting.

Since, however, they were somewhat more radical than anything that we could stand for officially, they were picked up by the press and featured out of all proportion, giving you, I assume, the basis for raising the question, "Is God A Capitalist?" which I am sure would never occur to any of our major speakers or to our Committee. It is to be regretted that your report was not based upon actual attendance at the meeting, or if perchance your reporter was present, it is a pity that he so conspicuously ignored the major message of the meeting and featured one wholly unofficial, impromptu and unscheduled comment.

CHARLES V. VICKREY, Secretary,
National Committee for
Religion and Welfare Recovery
December 24, 1936.

Sirs:

Our attention has been called to the editorial in your edition of October 16, 1936, "Is God A Capitalist?"

We are frank to say that we do not understand the title, as the God worshipped by the Protestants, the Catholics and the Jews cooperating in the Religion and Welfare Recovery Movement is not a capitalist nor a Socialist nor a Communist nor subject to identification with any of our socio-political issues.

But it is not so much the title of the editorial to which we take exception, as the manifest lack of knowledge of the facts shown by your editorial and the consequent injustice done to our organization.

It is not a fact that our organization has "the avowed objective of defending established capitalistic institutions, euphemistically called 'character-building'."

It is not a fact that the speakers of our Town Hall meeting were representative of the Republican and the Democratic party and not of the Socialist party. The political affiliation of the speakers did not for a moment enter into our minds. It was their religious affiliation which determined their choice. They were

chosen as representative Catholics, Protestants and Jews.

It is not a fact that the program of our organization is that "of employing religious sanctities for a holy crusade against Communism."

It is not a fact that the purpose of our organization is that of "identifying God with the capitalist system of private property and . . . of defending the status quo."

It is not a fact "that the Loyalty Day meeting in New York denounced the Communists, but did not denounce the fascists in this country—Father Coughlin, for example."

Had you made an attempt to familiarize yourself with the facts and to learn what was the character of the meeting and what are the purposes and the activities of the Religion and Welfare Recovery Movement which you so roundly condemn, you would not have been misled into this patently unfair attack on a meeting and a movement seeking to deepen spiritual life in America through increased loyalty to our several homes of worship.

We would ask that in justice to your readers you familiarize yourself with our personnel, our purposes and our work, so that instead of hindering, you will help us in our effort to deepen that sense of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man which will render impossible in our America such outbreaks of misunderstanding and prejudice as your editorial shows, or such outbreaks of prejudice, ill-will and persecution as we have unhappily witnessed in the past year in other countries.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
RELIGION AND WELFARE RECOVERY

December 24, 1936.

[In defense of the position taken in our editorial, we submit the following:

1) We consider it subversive to the cause of high religion for an organization dedicated to Religion and Welfare Recovery to have its platform graced by a man such as Mr. James W. Gerard, who had openly condoned Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and who expresesd himself as sympathetic to the side of the fascist insurrectionists in Spain.

2) If Mr. Gerard's tirade against communism was "impromptu" and "by no means the official message of the meeting," and if his comments "were picked up by the press and featured out of all proportion," we feel that a protest should have been lodged with the newspapers guilty of such reporting and not with us for relying on these reports, especially since the newspapers which carried them did not publish a correction or disavowal from the Religion and Welfare Recovery Committee.

3) Our editorial was based not merely on the speech by Mr. Gerard as reported in the press, but also on the three official speeches as released by the organization. Two out of these three speeches plainly denounced communism as being "atheistic" and "destructive." We quoted from two of these speeches in our editorial.

4) No speaker denounced fascism. In the speech by Mr. MacDonald, as officially released, there does appear the following statement:

"I have thought that members of the clergy of all faiths had dedicated their lives to performing a spiritual function. But when one sees a member of the clergy, appearing in clerical garb, so far forgetting that mission as to indulge in vituperation aimed at the head of a political group, I cannot help but feel that all members of the clergy suffer in the opinion of younger people."

This is undoubtedly an attack against Father Coughlin for being insulting to President Roosevelt. This statement, however, is not an attack against fascism, nor an attack against Father Coughlin for espousing fascism. Mr. Taft did declare, "We believe in democracy and we refuse to concede that autocratic government can furnish the highest way of life." But nowhere in the official releases was fascism denounced *by name* as was communism.

5) In view of the anti-communist tenor of two out of three official speeches, and in view of Mr. Gerard's unofficial "impromptu" anti-communist tirade which was not repudiated by the officers at the Town Hall meeting nor corrected or disavowed in the form of a letter to the press, we have a right to assume on the basis of its public performance (and not on the basis of the fine phrases in its catalogue) that the Religion and Welfare Recovery Committee is identifying God with the capitalist system and the *status quo*, and is hiding its reactionary pretensions by "employing religious sanctities for a holy crusade against communism."

6) Furthermore, when the Religion and Welfare Recovery Committee declares in its catalogue that its objectives include "increased loyalty to established religious and character-building institutions," we feel justified in concluding on the basis of the speeches quoted in our editorial, "that the word *established* is another way of saying 'capitalistic'." In light of the evidence adduced above, what else could the word *established* mean in the sentence cited? What is its force? What does it aim to exclude?

7) In conclusion, we wish to reiterate what we stated in our editorial: namely, that "Instead of inveighing against communists and atheists, leaders in Church and Synagogue ought to help create a mood of rebellion and struggle against the social injustices that make men become anti-church and social revolutionaries," and that the only proper concern of a Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery ought to be to generate "among its membership the social and religious idealism necessary for stimulating social change and social reconstruction."—Ed.]